
Anniversaries

It is not the place that commends man, but it is man who commends the place.¹

The previous four chapters have shown how the main corollary to the definition of *res sacra* differed depending on whether the primary context was legal or ritual. Legally, the corollary that a church is protected took precedence; ritually, the corollary that a church is protecting did. This chapter shows how non-Chalcedonian writers used the ritual context to completely override civil authorization of the concept of *res sacrae*.

Recall that Augustine and others had petitioned to have the Donatist bishop, Crispinus of Calama, penalized in Africa on the basis of a law promulgated against heretics in the Roman prefecture named the East.² All our information regarding this particular dispute comes from members of the prosecution. We will never know how Crispinus defended himself. By contrast, we do have the voices of opposition that non-Chalcedonian writers transmitted in response to their Chalcedonian rivals' legal upper hand. The objections were not recorded in the form of legal literature. Instead, such defensive voices were raised in ritual contexts celebrating anniversaries of church consecrations.

The historical evidence analyzed here is of a different nature from the foregoing chapters. It is shrouded by the strategy of pseudepigraphy.³ Two homilies produced in the late sixth or early seventh century tell stories about how churches were consecrated. One is attributed to Basil of Caesarea, the other to Theophilus of Alexandria. They have been difficult to interpret, considered at best "pious fictions" and at worst "apocrypha" among scholars. I will show that these pseudepigraphic homilies respond to the issue of which churches are sacred. The writers assume a great deal of contextual knowledge on the part of the implied audience. The wider legal and ritual discourse of late antiquity, coupled with ongoing debates over the administrative decisions made at the Council of Chalcedon, provide the interpretive keys to these cryptic homilies. The shrouded stories respond to the question of what counts as *res sacrae*.

On the anniversary celebrations of churches' consecration, these pseudonymous writers offered a reason independent from the juristic one for why their churches were sacred—not because they were legally consecrated but because Christ's very own hands sanctified them. Of course, the bishops and other writers and artists cited in chapters 4 and 5 would not have denied the presence and authorization of Christ and his saints at fourth- and fifth-century consecrations, but they did not detach the significance of such celestial authorization from its civil intermediaries. Recall that Justinian and Theodora's depictions stood right alongside episcopal depictions at San Vitale in Ravenna (figs. 4, 19, and 20). The sixth- and seventh-century writers discussed in this chapter did detach celestial authority from civil intermediaries. Christ and his saints directly governed and enforced the sacrality of churches and the protection of churches. The sixth- and seventh-century need to override the law arose in the long aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 led to a deep rift between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians.⁴ By the late sixth and early seventh centuries, the church was geographically divided. For the most part, non-Chalcedonians dominated the Roman regions of Egypt and Syria, while Chalcedonians largely held Asia Minor and Palestine. Chalcedonian churches were legally recognized. Non-Chalcedonian ones were not.

Non-Chalcedonian writers would use church building and consecration as a narrative topos for defending the sanctity of their places of worship and responding to Chalcedonian claims. Dispossessed of legal status and exiled from the sacred topography of Palestine, non-Chalcedonian writers deployed a ritual conception of "the sacred" to insist on the sanctity of their holy places despite the law, to de-stress the significance of *res sacrae* in Jerusalem, and to create a new Holy Land.

Since the imperial government did not recognize the episcopacy of non-Chalcedonian bishops, the church consecrations they performed were, therefore, not legally valid and did not generate *res sacrae*. To bypass the imperial authorization that they lacked, non-Chalcedonian writers appealed to the authorities of the heavenly realm, Christ the King par excellence and his agents, the holy ones. The consecration of churches, according to these non-Chalcedonian narratives, took place at the very hands of Christ, as well as the patron saint of the church. The celestial agents who performed the liturgy indisputably bore authority for Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians alike. There was no need for recognition from the emperor, no need for an intermediary government. Christ and his court governed non-Chalcedonians directly.

However, the narratives do not appeal solely to the authority of the agents performing the ritual, in accordance with legal stipulations. The stories also claim sacred status as defined in the ritual sphere. Their holy places promoted practices of mercy. The narratives praise those who expend their assets on those in need and they denounce the wealthy who fail to practice mercy in such ways. These

stories were composed as homilies to be read at the respective church's annual anniversary of consecration. Yearly, festival participants would gather to hear the story of how the church was originally built and consecrated by Christ himself and his saints.

Because the non-Chalcedonian stories offer ritualized responses to legal issues concerning the consecration of churches, this chapter makes them the centerpiece of an analysis of anniversary celebrations. Many other types of anniversary practices, however, arose in late antiquity. Though they will not be the focus of study, the next section offers a brief overview of them in order to situate the specific anniversaries to which this chapter is devoted within the broader context of anniversary celebration.

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Of all church consecrations, one stood out, and in retrospect it became significant throughout the East: the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in 335.⁵ The church's imperial founder, Constantine, did not attend the consecration, and none of the performative elements of the occasion were published in antiquity.⁶ So we do not know what was heard and seen at the festivities of the inauguration in 335. This fact stands in stark contrast to the mass of evidence that survives of anniversary celebrations for the inauguration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, not only at the church itself, but elsewhere across the Mediterranean as well. The first known pilgrim to attend an anniversary of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre's consecration is Egeria. Like the *theoroi* described in the previous chapter, the nun wrote a report for her fellow ascetics at home in Hispania. She places the importance of the festival on par with the great feasts of Epiphany and Easter and describes where and how each day of the octave was spent.⁷ The feast, as Egeria and the historian Sozomen note, could be referred to simply as the *encaenia*, the feast of "renewal."

The *encaenia* coincided with the feast for the finding of the cross, and this dual celebration migrated far beyond Jerusalem and its environs, spreading into every eastern Christian liturgical calendar. At these anniversary celebrations, homilists often addressed the theme of the resurrection (on account of the name of the church commemorated) or the cross (on account of the proximity of the feast day to the feast of the cross and the coordinated theme of the passion). In the West, the feast of the cross migrated without its concomitant celebration of the *encaenia*, since, by the seventh century, the importance of the *encaenia* came to be eclipsed by that of the cross. In the East, the relationship between the *encaenia* and the cross became so obscure that even Sophronius of Jerusalem could confess that he did not understand why the resurrection was celebrated as a prefeast to that of the cross.⁸ It is during this time that the feast of the cross made its way into Western calendars without the *encaenia*.⁹

In the West, as in the East, however, the anniversaries of other specific churches would become so important that their celebrations would spread beyond the locale of the church building. The festivals for the anniversaries of the Lateran, of Saints Peter and Paul, of the Liberian Basilica, and of the Archangel Michael spread throughout the West.¹⁰ In Armenia, the celebration of the anniversary of the Church of Etchmiadzin, “mother of all the churches of the world,” spread.¹¹ Like saints, churches had birthdays, too, and they were celebrated in similar ways. Though the birthday celebration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre became most widespread in late antiquity, locally the birthdays of nearby churches would be celebrated year after year, and sometimes these festivities migrated beyond the locale of the church itself too.

In Syria, a general birthday of “the Church” and all church buildings developed. This feast would be celebrated for two to five weeks to launch the start of the liturgical year in West Syria, but it was celebrated to mark the end of the year in East Syria. The length of the feast varies (two, three, four, or five weeks), depending on the calendar.¹² The same set of lections are prescribed in both West and East Syrian four-week-long periods.¹³ This period has two names in East Syrian liturgical books: “renewal of the Church” (*ḥuddāt ʿēdtā*) and “dedication of the Church” (*quddās ʿēdtā*).¹⁴

A survey of all the evidence for retrospective practices would create a dizzying array. A large amount of historical evidence survives for anniversary celebrations in late antiquity, relative to the amount of evidence for the inaugurations. This chapter analyzes only select anniversaries celebrated in the region of Egypt in order to show how homilists deployed anniversaries as occasions for defending the sanctity of illegal churches.

NON-CHALCEDONIAN HOMILIES ON THE FIRST CHURCH OF MARY

For the unknown homilists of this chapter, the church building is not an exemplar of beauty that human souls must surpass, as the known homilists discussed in chapter 5 maintained. The church building is actually held to an even higher standard than human souls. Materials used for church construction must be perpetually spotless. This exceptionally high standard for the “life cycle” of church construction materials—a theological perspective at odds with the principles analyzed in chapter 5—developed not in conversation with fourth- and fifth-century homilies and hymns but in defense of non-Chalcedonian causes. Because non-Chalcedonian churches were not consecrated by imperially endorsed bishops, because their places of worship were denied the legal status of *res sacrae*, non-Chalcedonian writers defended the sanctity of their holy sites by claiming that they were sanctified by the very hands of Christ and his saints. One narrative goes so far as to claim that a part of the church was *acheiropoiētos*, not made by human

hands. The composers of two homilies concerning the very first church built in the name of Saint Mary insist that the respective churches were completely virginal. The homilists produce a high standard for the church building, one that the listeners must rise up to meet in order to gain entry into the church, but one that would be difficult to surpass.

In Copto-Arabic literature, three different stories claim to commemorate the first church built and consecrated in the name of the Virgin Mary. One story claims that this church is in Philippi; another claims it is in Koskam; and still a third claims it is in Athribis.¹⁵ The stories evince no awareness of each other's claims to primacy. The feast days of each consecration coexist on Egyptian liturgical calendars despite the fact that the stories of Philippi, Koskam, and Athribis make mutually exclusive claims.¹⁶ One Ethiopic collection of the miracles of Mary juxtaposes the stories about Athribis and Koskam—again despite their mutually exclusive claims.¹⁷

In what follows, I focus on the accounts concerning Philippi and Koskam. At the end, I return to the story concerning Athribis. I argue that the anonymous writers who assumed the pseudonyms of “Basil of Caesarea” (for Philippi) and “Theophilus of Alexandria” (for Koskam) hypervalorized the sacrality of their churches to the following ends: (1) to claim for their churches the status of “sacred thing” (*res sacra*) despite imperial repression; and (2) to respond to their dispossession of *res sacrae* in Palestine. The stories offer two-pronged, non-Chalcedonian responses to Chalcedonian possession of churches in Palestine, particularly Jerusalem. I will first analyze the special status claimed for the churches of Philippi and Koskam. Then I will propose political subtexts related to the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and explain how the compositions address the trauma of ecclesial dispossession and consolidate the identity of a non-Chalcedonian opposition.

The Ps-Basilian and Ps-Theophilan stories have been difficult to place historically, though by all accounts scholars consider them late antique compositions.¹⁸ I argue that they belong to the period of the late sixth and early seventh centuries. Like most Coptic literary productions of this period, the texts respond to the Chalcedonian Byzantine Empire's claims.¹⁹ They do so, however, in subtle ways, and their concern lies not in doctrinal matters but in *res sacrae*, in churches.

Witnesses to Ps-Basil and Ps-Theophilus's homilies survive in multiple languages: Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic. Ps-Theophilus's homily (*maymar*) also survives in Syriac. The earliest witness to Ps-Basil's homily (“catechesis”) dates to the tenth century, and it is possible that the earliest witness to Ps-Theophilus does, too. A late-tenth century manuscript that originally belonged to the library of the Monastery of Saint Macarius in Wādī al-Natrūn, Egypt transmits Ps-Basil's homily in Bohairic Coptic.²⁰ Sahidic Coptic fragments of Ps-Theophilus's homily that may date to the tenth or eleventh centuries originally belonged to the White Monastery in Sohag, Egypt.²¹ The two texts circulated widely in Arabic translation and redaction, sometimes occupying the same volume.

WHY THE FIRST CHURCH OF MARY IS SACRED

Both stories claim that their respective churches were the first ever to have been built and consecrated in the name of the Virgin Mary. For this reason, they are irrefutably sacred, even if they are not legally *res sacrae*. In addition to the personal involvement of Christ, angels, saints, and the Virgin Mary herself, the stories emphatically underscore the sacrality of the church in still other ways.

According to Ps-Basil of Caesarea, the foundations of the first church in Philippi were miraculously and effortlessly drawn, having been laid by the hands of the apostles Peter and Paul and led by the hands of Christ himself. During the ritual of consecration, Christ laid hands on Peter and ordained him patriarch of the apostles. The church is irrefutably sacred because Christ himself, his mother, and the apostles conducted the entire affair, and that included the choice of location, the demarcation of foundation lines, the construction, and the consecration. In fact, the first patriarchal ordination in Christian history occurred in it just after the church was consecrated.

Whereas Basil learned all these details by finding a letter written by the hand of Luke the doctor of Antioch, Theophilus heard about the first church built in Koskam firsthand in a personal revelation from the voice of Mary herself. Mary told Theophilus that before Christ ascended to heaven, he took her and the apostles to Koskam and consecrated the very first church ever built in her name.²² The ritual practice observed at that service became the model that every church consecration thereafter would follow.²³ The church is irrefutably sacred because Christ himself, Mary, and the apostles consecrated it not only before Mary died but even before Christ ascended to heaven. What is more: it was at Koskam that Christians first learned how to consecrate a church.

The first churches of Mary were so sacred that they served as the church of the first patriarchal ordination and the church of the first consecration ritual, respectively. Legally, however, non-Chalcedonian churches were not *res sacrae*. Roman and Byzantine law and ecclesiastical canons designated only churches consecrated by imperially endorsed bishops as *res sacrae*. Because the non-Chalcedonian ecclesiastical hierarchies did not have an imperial stamp of approval, they resorted to authorization beyond the realm of the law. No mere bishop, legally recognized or not, consecrated non-Chalcedonian churches. Christ the King himself consecrated them. Yet the stories do not stop there. The special construction materials and the saints' protection of the churches testify to a sacrality *intrinsic* to the material churches.

Special Building Materials

The Construction of the Churches at Philippi. The "catechesis" of Ps-Basil of Caesarea recounts the construction of not just one but two churches: the original church of Mary built by Christ, Peter, and Paul and a new public Great Church constructed under the patronage of Bishop Basil and a civil official, the *praepositus*

Eumenius.²⁴ The story mirrors the two construction processes by means of a narrative doublet. In the course of each construction—that of the original church and that of the new church—the narrative juxtaposes the privileged sight of the clergy with the obstructed view of the marveling people. During the construction of the original church, only the apostles and the few disciples see Christ pour water into the foundation lines and command columns to set themselves up. The crowd of people watch and marvel at the spectacle without seeing Christ.²⁵ During the construction of the new church, Mary tells Basil how to find an *acheiropoiētos* (“not made by hands,” ἀσνεχλιχ ἡρώμι) mosaic of her.²⁶ Basil finds the mosaic covered with a silk cloth, uncovers it, and sees the face of Mary depicted on it. After he and the clerics accompanying him bring the mosaic and set it down in front of the sanctuary, the crowd marvels at the size of the slab and its covering, without seeing the mosaic image.²⁷ The privileged seers see Christ on the first occasion and they see the depiction of Mary on the second occasion; the crowds in each case marvel at an obstructed vision. This narrative trope of privileged sight amplifies the sacrality of the building materials at both moments of construction. The more sacred the sight, the more restricted its viewing becomes.

The building materials are specially chosen by Christ or Mary. This feature is particularly pronounced in the story of the Basilian foundation. Basil had already acquired precious materials, itemized three times in the narrative as a slab of hyacinth (πλαζ ἡριακύνθινον), gold (νογβ), precious stones (πῶμι ἴμμι), pearls (πῶμι ἡμαργαριτῆς), and white lead (named only in the third list, πιψιμθιονον).²⁸ Basil had requested the hyacinth-stone slab from a “merciless rich man” (ραμλο ἡθοναι), who refused to supply it, uttered blasphemies, and died as a result.²⁹ The man’s family donates the slab, plus all the other expensive materials itemized above, to secure forgiveness on his behalf. Mary appears to Basil in a vision, however, and informs him that he must not allow the donated materials to be used to make an image of her. The materials were acquired violently, she says, and the oil of sinners may not anoint her head.³⁰ Mary’s mosaic must be made of materials with the purest lineage, to the point that the image’s production must not have involved human hands at all. The acceptable adornment of the new church of Mary required materials of the utmost sacrality.

The icon is not only *acheiropoiētos*; it is also personified as a living being. When Basil hesitates to carry the large-scale mosaic from the site of its discovery to the church under construction, the mosaic speaks to Basil, asking him why he delays in picking it up and promising that its burden is light.³¹ The *acheiropoiētos* icon testifies to its own exceptionality.

The Virginal Space of the Church at Koskam. The story of the church at Koskam does not attribute to it any luxury; nor does it mention any icons, yet the church at Koskam, too, is made of the most sacred of building materials. The church does not contain an *acheiropoiētos* mosaic or a speaking one, but

simply consists of natural, pure, rock landscape never previously occupied before the Holy Family's sixth-month stay there. According to the story, Mary and Joseph disagree about where to stay after they have met with tribulation after tribulation throughout their three-year journey south. Joseph proposes staying in an inhabited place, but Mary insists on going into the mountainous wilderness. Joseph's resistance underscores Mary's choice to go to a never-inhabited place. In fact, as darkness descends and they still have found no place to rest, Joseph reprimands Mary for failing to heed his advice. The child Jesus in turn defends his mother, telling his earthly father Joseph that it is the will of his heavenly Father that they dwell in an uninhabited house.³² The Father himself selected a virginal landscape as the place of a long-term abode for the Holy Family, which would later become the place for the consecration of the first church. The text does not use the term *acheiropoiētos* or any near equivalent, but the emphasis on a never-inhabited, pure, wilderness implies divine creation unsullied by human involvement.

Special Protection from Acts of Outrage

Pure and Inviolable Koskam. Both irrefutably sacred spaces also withstand threats of violation.³³ Mary narrates to Theophilus a long catalog of abuses that she, the child Jesus, Joseph, and Salome endured after their entry into Egypt from the northeast and throughout their journey southward. At Koskam, however, the family enjoys a long respite with angels serving them throughout their stay. A threat of an attack occurs, however, when Satan appears to Herod for a second time, informs him of the Holy Family's exact location in the mountains west of Koskam, and instructs him to send ten soldiers to kill Jesus. Joseph's nephew Mūsās learns of Herod's new plan and travels ahead of the soldiers to warn Joseph in advance. The plan becomes divinely thwarted somehow. The family remains undisturbed in the previously uninhabited house for a total of six months until an angel appears to Joseph and instructs him to return to Israel because Herod has died and the ten soldiers he had sent are now in Gehenna.³⁴

Not only does the house in the mountain of Koskam remain pure and inviolate despite the king's threats; Theophilus does not renovate or renew the house. Before arriving at Koskam, Theophilus had traveled throughout Egypt to expend an imperial donation of pagan temple spolia on the poor, the monasteries, the buildings in the mountains, and the building and restoration of churches in Egypt.³⁵ Theophilus intends to return to Alexandria when he is told about Koskam and is invited to celebrate the feast of Mary there on 21 Tūbi.³⁶ Theophilus prays for a revelation regarding the church of Koskam, and Mary appears to him to tell him the full story herself. Theophilus merely recounts what Mary told him; the story makes no mention of any embellishments or changes to the existing structure that result from Theophilus's visit.

Policing Access to the Sacred at Philippi. At Philippi, the very materiality of the church protects it from any form of outrage. When a woman guilty of three egregious sins (betrayal, soricide, and adultery) anoints herself with oil issuing from the *acheiropoiētos* mosaic, she becomes leprous. When a spring of water issues from one of the columns supporting the mosaic, she and other sinners come to wash but, instead of receiving healing, an abyss opens at the foot of the column and swallows them. According to the story, the waters are healing waters, but the narrative provides no concrete account of how an individual received mercy through the icon or the springwater.³⁷ The materiality of the church is so sacred that it can police its own boundaries, permitting access only to the pure, unarmed with any grievous sins.³⁸

For both stories, the churches are sacred for all the same reasons stipulated in Roman and Byzantine law: they are consecrated and divinely protected, especially from acts of outrage. However, there is one legal stipulation from which they must excuse themselves: consecration at the hands of an imperially endorsed bishop. They therefore resorted to claims of celestial consecration, explicitly marking the superiority of celestial royalty's festivals over those of earthly royalty.

Earthly versus Celestial Festivals of Consecration. Ps-Basil and Ps-Theophilus preface their main stories with a comparison of earthly versus celestial rulers' choices. According to Ps-Basil,

It is not a consecration like the consecration of the former time when our forefathers and the kings who ruled on the earth celebrated consecrations. If the kings of the earth, when they have founded palaces or temples, slay calves/bulls on the foundation as well as he-goats and wild animals (for they do such things), and once they have ceased building the palace, the friends of the king gather in it and bring expensive things, gold, silver, wood, and many costly stones to complete the palace, and they recline and bring the players of the *kithara* and the *kitharas*, drums, cymbals, and flutes and make abominable songs in the midst, which draw the souls who do such things to the Gehenna of fire—for if they do so in sensuous deeds in impious dwelling places, then they perform otherwise [in] the temple of the queen and her palace, the dwelling place of angels, the church of the faithful, the frequent gathering place of all the holy ones.

For I see a crowd of kings gathered in this holy place today who are *not of the earth*. And I see a crowd of strong powers in full regalia gathered with us who are *not of these times*. I see crowds of trumpeters and horn-blowers who are *not of the flesh* gathered with us celebrating joyfully in full regalia in the palace of the Queen of all women, the holy Virgin, the Mother of God, the holy Mary.³⁹

Ps-Basil replaces imperial consecratory festival participants with heavenly ones, not of the earth or of time or of the flesh. He even criticizes the excesses of imperial festival practices.

As for Ps-Theophilus, he explicitly names Christ “the lawgiver,” with the unstated implication that this appellation does not belong to the emperor.⁴⁰ Ps-Theophilus also stresses how starkly different the kind of abode Christ chose is from the abodes of rulers: “Truly God preferred this mountain (and descended to it with his Mother the Virgin) over all the cities of Egypt, and he did not wish to live in the house of an *archon*, nor did he choose the houses of the rich, but rather he desired the abode of this deserted house uninhabited by any human.”⁴¹ God rejects the residencies of the powerful, selecting to live instead in the natural wilderness, where no human had ever lived. Furthermore, Ps-Theophilus employs Herod’s kingship as a foil to that of Christ. While King Herod’s most trusted adviser is the devil, the Father is the one who guides Christ the King’s actions in the story.

This general contrast between what Christ the King and Lawgiver and his mother Queen Mary do versus what “kings of the earth,” “friends of the king,” “archons,” “the rich,” or “King Herod” do constitutes the only explicit means by which Ps-Basil and Ps-Theophilus suggest a political context. As I will argue below, the texts otherwise respond in implicit or cryptic ways to major issues that followed in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon. The stories assume knowledge on the part of the implied audience of broader political subtexts. They do not respond to political circumstances by trying to persuade outsiders of their causes but by consolidating the insider identity of the opposition. In other words, they are stories written by non-Chalcedonians for non-Chalcedonians (not for Chalcedonian rivals or powers that be).

THE AFTERMATH OF THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON

Like all ecclesiastical councils, the Council of Chalcedon in 451 considered administrative matters, not just theological issues, and these were also quite controversial. Among non-Chalcedonians, Juvenal of Jerusalem would be remembered as the bishop who betrayed doctrinal orthodoxy in exchange for the elevation of his episcopal seat to patriarchal status. Jerusalem had formerly fallen under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan see of Caesarea. As a result of the decision at Chalcedon, however, Caesarea lost a large amount of jurisdictional territory, ceding it to the see of Jerusalem, which had henceforth been promoted to the status of patriarchate of all Palestine.⁴² It was not only the opposition to Chalcedon in Palestine, Syria, and Egypt that criticized this decision; even the Chalcedonian Pope Leo of Rome voiced his dissent.⁴³

By all accounts, both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian, Juvenal used every means, fair and foul, to elevate the position of his episcopal seat. Non-Chalcedonians initially succeeded in installing one Theodosius as the non-Chalcedonian bishop of Jerusalem and keeping Juvenal out of the city. However, Juvenal would arrive twenty months later with imperial troops to subdue the opposition and assume

his patriarchal position.⁴⁴ For a century, the fate of Palestine—the region of *res sacrae* par excellence—remained unclear: would it fall into Chalcedonian or non-Chalcedonian hands? By the end of Justinian's imperial tenure in the sixth century, however, Palestine's Chalcedonian identity would be secured.⁴⁵ There would be almost a three-century long vacancy in the non-Chalcedonian hierarchy of Jerusalem after Theodosius's exile and Juvenal's reinstallation.⁴⁶ Non-Chalcedonians no longer administered the most celebrated of *res sacrae*, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

It was also in the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon that Mary's role came to be politicized on a much grander scale than heretofore. By the mid-sixth century, she would become the official protectress of the city of Constantinople.⁴⁷ Juvenal would be remembered as the one who found Mary's funeral garment in the Church of Mary in the Valley of Josaphat in Jerusalem and gave it to the regents Pulcheria and Marcian at their request, who proceeded to enshrine it as a contact relic in the Marian Church of Blachernae in Constantinople.⁴⁸ Byzantine troops would carry Mary's girdle and icons in battle against the Avars in 626.⁴⁹

By the mid-sixth century, not only the Marian shrines but all the *res sacrae* of Palestine fell squarely and firmly into the hands of Chalcedonians. For one century (the mid-fifth to the mid-sixth century), Palestine was the primary battleground over which Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians fought.⁵⁰ While Palestine became uncompromisingly Chalcedonian, the regions of Egypt and Syria, by contrast, remained strongholds of opposition to Chalcedon. Egypt even became a place of exile for some Palestinian and Syrian non-Chalcedonians.⁵¹

The non-Chalcedonian writer of Ps-Theophilus's story has a distinctive perspective on Mary's role and interprets non-Chalcedonian experiences of exile, travail, and ecclesial dispossession by imagining hers. The non-Chalcedonian writer of Ps-Basil's story responds in another way to ecclesial dispossession—by imagining an all-powerful Mary in full support of Caesarea's primacy over Jerusalem. Though the strategies they employ differ, the writers of both stories downplay the importance of *res sacrae* in Jerusalem.⁵²

NON-CHALCEDONIAN PERSPECTIVES ON MARY

Mary in Ps-Theophilus's Homily: A Non-Chalcedonian Response to the Loss of Palestine's Res Sacrae

The *maymar* of Ps-Theophilus relates in detail Mary's sadness, tears, and agony throughout her three-and-a-half years as a refugee in Egypt. The *maymar* does not dive directly into a narration of Mary's exile but first supplies the reader with an apocalyptic interpretive lens. The initial paragraphs claim that Koskam has become more significant than the mountains of Jerusalem and Sinai. The *maymar* quotes Isaiah 2:2–3 as a proof text and employs the passage as a hinge, opening the

door to an exegesis of Revelation 12. When Isaiah spoke of the mountain of the Lord in the last days, he meant Mount Koskam:

*“In those last days, the mountain of the Lord will appear with signs and it will be renowned and elevated over all the mountains and become higher than the mounts and hills, and every nation and all the peoples will come to it, saying to one another, ‘Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, so He may inform us of the way to follow.’ For the law comes from Zion and the word of God from Jerusalem” [Is 2:2–3]. You [Koskam] are truly the mountain of the Lord and the house of the God of Jacob because the one who gave the law and laid down the law and his mother the Virgin dwelt in you. You are the new, upright, smooth path that everyone follows easily.*⁵³

The *maymar* identifies the mountain that would appear in the last days as the mountain of Koskam on the grounds that the one who set forth and issued the law (Christ) and his mother both came to dwell in the mountain of Koskam. Mary appears in this interpretation not directly linked to the passage cited from Isaiah, but as the one who accompanied the lawgiver in his abode on the mountain.

The *maymar* then turns from the “last days” as described by Isaiah to the book of Revelation, particularly the woman described in chapter 12. The *maymar* supplies an allegorical interpretation. After quotations from Revelation 12:1, 5, and 13–17, the *maymar* then names the allegorical key. The woman is the queen of all women, Mary. The sun with which she is clothed is “our Savior Jesus.” The moon under her feet is John the Baptist. The twelve stars on her head are the twelve disciples. The dragon is the devil. The flooding water is Herod. The desert to which the woman fled is “this house,” the church of Koskam.⁵⁴

The ensuing story of Mary’s exile details at length what Revelation 12 described in veiled terms. Mary offers personal testimony of her journey with her son (Jesus), betrothed (Joseph), and midwife (Salome). Mary explains how the devil twice advised Herod to pursue them and how she endured the fatigue of carrying her son in her arms over long distances, the bitterness of the rejection of even a cup of water, the theft of her and her family’s belongings, and the threat of a violent death in her exile from Jerusalem. She says that she wept many a tear and complained to her son regularly of the tribulations she endured over the course of three-and-a-half years.⁵⁵ Even decades later, Mary continued to weep about her exile. The resurrected Christ asks,

My pure mother, why are you weeping and despondent? You have unending joy, cheer, and rejoicing. Do not be despondent about my crucifixion and death; for by my death I have given life to all of my creation. *If you are despondent about your trials, flight from place to place, and your stay in a deserted house where there was no human, I will now consecrate it with my divine hand before any church is consecrated on the earth in my name.*⁵⁶

Koskam becomes the consolation of all Mary's tears and trials, the end of her weeping and the beginning of her joy.

The text does not explicitly refer to Chalcedonians or late antique political exigencies, but I propose reading the *maymar's* identification of Koskam with the mountain in Isaiah 2 and Mary with the woman of Revelation 12 as strategic. Mary's trials become an exemplar through which the audience might read their own current experience of ecclesial dispossession and exile.⁵⁷ That Mary in this text may represent a non-Chalcedonian experience of exile in Egypt I will argue by juxtaposing Ps-Theophilus's *maymar* with two other texts—Rufus of Shotep's *Homilies on Matthew* and Stephen of Heracleopolis Magna's *Panegyric on Apollo, Archimandrite of the Monastery of Isaac*.

Nothing is known of Stephen, the bishop of Heracleopolis Magna, except two works he wrote, one of which is a panegyric on the archimandrite Apollo, probably composed by the turn of the seventh century.⁵⁸ To criticize the Chalcedonian ascendancy of the sixth century, Stephen offers an allegorical interpretation of Revelation 9:1–2 and follows it with an extended reflection on the theme of lament.

"I saw," said John in his Apocalypse, "a star that had fallen from heaven" [Rev 9:1a]. "The pit of the abyss was opened. Smoke of a great fire went up. The sun and the air became dark though the smoke of the pit" [Rev 9:2], the pit of the impiety which the rulers had gathered up who had come together to Chalcedon. This very pit of the abyss was opened again in the days of the Emperor Justinian. [. . .] The bad weed grew again in the kingdom of Justinian like a hidden fire in chaff which continues to produce smoke.⁵⁹

Stephen interprets imperial endorsements of Chalcedon as openings and reopenings of "the pit of the abyss" of Revelation 9. The panegyric then brackets recollections of the non-Chalcedonian orthodox's lamentable experiences at the hands of the Chalcedonians with the imperative, "Let the people weep" at the outset, and then the rhetorical question, "What lament then is not for the orthodox at that time?" at the end.⁶⁰ The panegyric attests to the fact that at least one bishop in Upper Egypt read part of Revelation as a prophetic depiction of the turmoil that would afflict the church in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon. The panegyric underscores the tears and despondency that accompany non-Chalcedonian plight.

Another Coptic writer, Rufus of Shotep, delivered homilies on the Gospel of Matthew in the last quarter of the sixth century.⁶¹ Rufus provides a witness of how one non-Chalcedonian bishop in Egypt interpreted the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt narrated in Matthew 2:13–18. Rufus allegorically interprets Herod as a heresiarch, and the blood of the executed children as the blood of the martyrs. Matthew 2:18 cites Jeremiah 31:15, which describes Rachel weeping over the loss of her children. Rufus explains that the name Rachel means "lamb," and the lamb weeps because "the wolf has destroyed her children."⁶² "What is the lamb?" Rufus asks, "Rachel is the church."⁶³ This exegesis places a heresiological and

martyrological lens on the Holy Family's exile. The story becomes one of a heresiarch pursuing the innocent orthodox, resulting in the spilling of martyrs' blood and the church's weeping. As far as we know, Rufus does not pinpoint any particular heresiological context. However, Rufus's contemporary context of the sixth century witnessed the first accession of an unbroken line of Chalcedonian emperors, beginning with Justin I in 518. His audience may well have had current political affairs in mind as they heard his interpretation of the Holy Family's flight. Pursued by the heresiarch (Justinian or other Chalcedonian emperors), the Holy Family (non-Chalcedonians) flee to Egypt, while children (non-Chalcedonians) suffer martyrdom, and Rachel (the non-Chalcedonian church) weeps.

If one reads Rufus of Shotep's interpretation of Matthew 2 and Stephen of Heracleopolis Magna's exegesis of Revelation 9 alongside Ps-Theophilus's understanding of Revelation 12 and first-person Marian testimony of the Holy Family's exile, one discerns a subtle political valence to the pseudepigraphon. Faced with the reality that Palestine belongs uncompromisingly to Chalcedonians, dispossessed of the *res sacrae* in Palestine, Ps-Theophilus creates a new, local Holy Land. Ps-Theophilus designates Mount Koskam as the mountain of the last days that rivals and exceeds the significance of Mounts Zion, Sinai, Horeb, and the Mount of Olives. Koskam is where Christ and his Father chose to build the first church of Mary. The preascended Christ personally took Mary and the disciples there before Mary died. Christ consecrates the church of Koskam to console his weeping mother, to lift her up from her unending despondency. At the very end of the narrative, Christ returns to Jerusalem with Mary and his disciples and he ascends to heaven. Therefore, Christ's final deed on earth, before his ascension to heaven, is to return to Koskam with his still-living mother and generate the first site of the Holy Land by performing the first consecration of a church.

Non-Chalcedonians weeping over their loss of *res sacrae* in Palestine were to find encouragement at Koskam. Just like non-Chalcedonians, Mary was expelled from Palestine; Mary suffered; and Mary wept. Her tribulations resonate all too well with the non-Chalcedonian plight. Just as Mary herself was given Koskam as her solace, non-Chalcedonians should be consoled by Egypt's Holy Land, which surpasses the *res sacrae* of Palestine.⁶⁴

It is telling that in the history of the interpretation of Revelation 12, non-Chalcedonian interpreters identify the woman with Mary, but Chalcedonian ones are reluctant to do so. In fact, a thirteenth-century Chalcedonian exegete even interprets the woman as the "anti-Theotokos."⁶⁵

*Mary in Ps-Basil's Homily: A Non-Chalcedonian Response
to Jerusalem's Ecclesiastical Elevation*

It is possible that Ps-Basil also evokes the woman of Revelation 12, at the very outset of the "catechesis" and when describing Mary's appearance. The first evocation lines up the words of Revelation 12:1 with a portrayal of the catholic church as

a mother. The “catechesis” opens with this invitation, a call to the children of the church: “Come to us today, O people beloved of Christ, children with whom the catholic church was in travail and bore.”⁶⁶ The words for “travail” (*τῆνακρη*) and “bore” (*μιση*) are exactly the same as those of extant Bohairic translations of Revelation 12:2.⁶⁷ Additionally, when Mary appears to Basil, she “shines like the sun as though her clothes were spun with shining lightning.”⁶⁸ These details of Mary’s illuminating clothing may have evoked Revelation 12:1.

However, the Mary of Ps-Basil never weeps. She is not despondent or sad; she is powerful and patiently teaches Basil to stop worrying and to trust in her support. She berates Basil once for his ignorance and twice for his negligence. In her first appearance, she greets Basil with the question, “Master Basil, don’t you know who I am?”⁶⁹ She instructs him to find her *acheiropoiētos* icon, but Basil objects on the grounds that he will also need two columns for the icon. She promises to provide these as well, so Basil goes to find the icon. On finding it, Basil and the clergy accompanying him are at a loss as to how they will carry such a long and broad mosaic. The mosaic berates Basil, asking him, “Why do you neglect to carry me?”⁷⁰ Mary later appears to Basil in a second vision and greets him with the question, “Why are you worried and have become neglectful of everything?”⁷¹ since Basil has not begun the task of retrieving the two columns she had promised him. In this story, Mary plays the part of the all-powerful leader and Basil that of the worried, neglectful, and reluctant servant. Mary teaches Basil to trust her and demonstrates her unwavering support of him.

The Primacy of Caesarea. This Mary, I argue, belongs to a story with the larger project of insisting on the primacy of Caesarea. Mary ratifies the primacy of Caesarea by personally superintending the construction of her new church there. The story either erroneously or intentionally conflates three different geographical locations with Caesarea, Palestine. Caesarea Philippi in Syria, Caesarea in Cappadocia, and the harbor city of Philippi in Macedonia are all merged into one place: the harbor city of Caesarea, Palestine. The writer draws together three important persons and events that take place in locales named either Caesarea, Philippi, or both. (1) Christ’s apostolic elevation of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16); (2) the apostolic sailing from the harbor city of Philippi (Acts 20); and (3) Basil’s episcopacy in Caesarea are all imagined to take place in the harbor city of Caesarea, Palestine.

Caesarea Philippi figures in only one context in apostolic history: Peter’s confession of Jesus as Christ the son of God; Peter’s naming as the rock (*πέτρα*) on which Christ will build his church; and Peter’s receipt of the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:13–20).⁷² There is no mention of Caesarea Philippi in the Acts of the Apostles; in fact, there is no mention of any Caesarea in the book of Acts. The harbor city of Philippi, however, does figure into the stories, and is mentioned three times. One of these instances includes the apostolic companion

Aristarchus of Thessalonica (Acts 20). According to the Lukan letter that Basil quotes, the apostles gather in the house of Aristarchus in Thessalonica. From Aristarchus's house, Christ takes them to Philippi to construct the very first church and to ordain Peter patriarch of the apostles in that first church. Since no post-ascension apostolic story portrays the apostles in Caesarea Philippi or any other Caesarea, for this reason Philippi in Macedonia becomes conflated with Caesarea Philippi in order to produce a context in which Matthew 16 may resonate with the narrative of Peter's ordination as patriarch. The strictures of the canonical apostolic stories cause the intentional or erroneous identification of Caesarea Philippi in Syria with Philippi in Macedonia.⁷³

A geographical problem remains in that Basil of Caesarea constructs the new church, but Basil was neither the bishop of Caesarea Philippi in Syria, nor was he the bishop of Philippi in Macedonia. What is Basil doing consecrating a church far beyond his jurisdiction? The issue of episcopal jurisdictional boundaries arose often between neighboring or coterminous jurisdictions, and these resulted in large-scale disputes and juridical trials. It would transgress the limits of late antique plausible imagination to have Basil of Cappadocia consecrating a church in Syria or Macedonia. I believe that the writer actually imagines Basil as bishop of the harbor city of Caesarea, Palestine, and conflates this harbor city with that of Philippi. As a result, Basil is bishop of the very location where Christ and the apostles had consecrated the first church in the name of Mary.

Two pieces of evidence show that Cappadocia and Palestine were conflated in Coptic literature. In his second panegyric on Claudius of Antioch, Constantine, the bishop of Sioout, provides biographical information about himself and Rufus of Shotep. He claims to have found a letter in the "library of Cappadocia" in the course of a journey undertaken with Rufus to venerate the cross in Jerusalem.⁷⁴ This has rightly caused scholars to wonder how Rufus and Constantine could have possibly been going through Cappadocia while en route to Jerusalem.⁷⁵ It simply does not make geographical sense for travelers departing from Egypt. In addition, no other writers in antiquity speak of a "library of Cappadocia," but there was a well-known library in Caesarea, Palestine. The rise of the cult of Saint George may have played a role in the conflation of Cappadocia and Palestine. George was said to have had a Cappadocian father and a Palestinian mother, and he was known interchangeably as "George of Cappadocia" and "George of Diospolis/Lydda (Palestine)." An encomium attributed to Theodotus of Ancyra of Galatia calls George's grandfather "eparch of Melitene and all Palestine" (*ἐπαρχος γιχεν μελιτινη νημ φπαλιστινη τηρε*), even though Melitene belonged to Cappadocia, never to Palestine.⁷⁶ Also, George is said to identify himself as "George the Melitene [Cappadocia] from Diospolis [Palestine]" (*γεωργιος πιμελιτων ηρεμη-οσπολις*).⁷⁷ In any event, Constantine speaks of being in Cappadocia en route to Jerusalem, which only makes geographic sense for a traveler setting sail from Egypt, if Constantine's "Cappadocia" in fact refers to Palestine. There are also indications

that the Caesareas of the two provinces (Cappadocia and Palestine) were conflated even in early Greek hagiographical literature.⁷⁸

If the “Basil of Caesarea in Cappadocia” was thought to be the bishop in fact of Caesarea, Palestine, and if the harbor city of Philippi in Macedonia was identified as the harbor city of Caesarea, Palestine, then the geographical conundrum of the Ps-Basilian narrative may be solved.⁷⁹ Basil consecrates a church in his very own city and cites an apostolic narrative about the very first church that had been built in that very same city. The authoritative, uncontroversially orthodox voice of Basil of Caesarea would thus be co-opted to insist on the primacy of Caesarea over all Palestine in the face of Jerusalem’s elevation to the status of a patriarchal see and the concomitant diminution of Caesarea’s status and jurisdiction.

To restate the proposition another way: imagine the pseudepigrapher, whose goal is to employ Basil of Caesarea, Jesus’s elevation of Peter, and postascension apostolic travel in tandem to underscore the primacy of Caesarea over Jerusalem. The pseudepigrapher conflates Palestine with Cappadocia, and therefore, when he says, “Basil of Caesarea, Cappadocia,” he means in fact the Caesarea in Palestine. Basil’s authority must also be combined with apostolic memory of Petrine authority established at Caesarea Philippi (in Syria) and with accounts of postascension apostolic travel to Philippi (in Macedonia). So, Caesarea Philippi and Philippi are interpreted as referring to the same place. Finally, the harbor cities of Philippi and Caesarea, Palestine are interpreted as the same place. The writer appears to refer to three different places (Caesarea, Cappadocia; Caesarea Philippi, Syria; and Philippi, Macedonia), but in fact means only one—Caesarea, Palestine. Why?

The bishops of Jerusalem had a long, documented history of demeaning the status of Caesarea, Palestine. Bishops of Jerusalem regularly attempted to have bishops of Caesarea prosecuted for their unorthodox faith, to the point that there is no bishop of Caesarea, Palestine who was celebrated in the sixth century for his orthodoxy.⁸⁰ In fact, the most famous of all the bishops of Caesarea, Palestine, Eusebius, would come to be remembered as an “Arian.” For any writer seeking to defend Caesarea’s place in the episcopal rankings by adopting a pseudonym, an uncontroversially orthodox bishop with great postpatristic authority would have to be chosen. For this reason, I believe, the anonymous composers of the Ps-Basilian text adopted Basil of Caesarea, Cappadocia as the spokesperson for Caesarea, Palestine on the basis of either an erroneous or an intentional conflation of the two regions of Cappadocia and Palestine.

For anyone acquainted with the historical Basil of Caesarea, his curriculum vitae aligns all too well with circumstances that non-Chalcedonians faced in Palestine. Basil of Caesarea had a large episcopal jurisdiction until Emperor Valens divided Cappadocia into two parts. Caesarea became the capital of only Cappadocia Prima, while Tyana became the capital of Cappadocia Secunda. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction as a rule followed civil lines; so, as a result of Valens’s measure, Basil lost half of his metropolitan jurisdiction to Anthimus of Tyana. In response to the

territorial diminution he faced, Basil consecrated many subordinate countryside bishops in an attempt to expand his jurisdiction.⁸¹ So, Basil, too, suffered territorial diminution and protested it. Basil was also remembered for refusing to comply with Emperor Valens's wish that he endorse a heretical doctrinal position, and Basil almost faced exile as a result.⁸² Basil—uncontrovertibly orthodox; known for suffering territorial diminution; known for resisting imperial pressure to subscribe to a heretical doctrine—made the perfect choice for a spokesperson on behalf of the non-Chalcedonian cause in favor of Caesarea. Recall that it is in Jerusalem that Basil finds Luke's letter about the first church and Peter's patriarchal ordination. Jerusalem itself testifies to the primacy of Caesarea.

Echoes of Justinian's Nea Ecclesia. It is possible that Justinian's construction of a massive church of Mary in Jerusalem may also underly the political issues to which the Ps-Basilian narrative responds. Since there was already a church of Mary in the Valley of Josaphat, Justinian's church acquired the designation "new church" (*Nea Ecclesia*).⁸³ Justinian had political reasons for founding this new Marian church-and-monastery complex in Jerusalem. Susan Graham states them well: "The presence of an imperially established monastery at the Nea, populated with 'orthodox' (Chalcedonian) monks and dedicated to the Theotokos, surely sent an implicit imperial message to non-Chalcedonians in Jerusalem and the Judean desert, for the monastic community in Jerusalem and the nearby desert was acutely divided theologically and ecclesiastically in the sixth century."⁸⁴ The Chalcedonian emperor Justinian built the largest, most lavish church of Mary in Jerusalem for Chalcedonians, a monumental sign of the exclusion of non-Chalcedonians.

A feature common to both Procopius's description of Justinian's Nea in Jerusalem and Ps-Basil's account of the construction of the new church of Mary is the miraculous story of how two exceptionally large stone columns of fire-red hue were discovered to support the sanctuary. According to Procopius, the Nea was built on such a large scale that finding stones from which to fashion the columns became a problem with only a miraculous solution. The stones that were discovered were of fire-red hue.⁸⁵ Archaeologists have shown that the only place where two exceptionally large columns needed to be installed in the Nea was at the triumphal arch leading into the sanctuary.⁸⁶ Because the columns in the portico of the Jewish temple were also said to have been of fire-red hue, one scholar suggested that the construction of the Nea involved the spoliation of the temple portico.⁸⁷ Ps-Basil's story describes the miraculous spoliation of a temple to produce two columns, so large that they were made in the time of the giants (*ΙΣΧΕΝ ΠΙΣΧΟΥ ΝΗΝΙΑΦΩΦ*), to support the sanctuary and the fire-red stone (*ΠΛΑΞ ΝΑΟΥΑΝ ΝΧΕΒC*) on which Mary's mosaic icon lay.⁸⁸ The resonance of such minute details—spoliation of two exceptionally large fire-red stone columns to install a triumphal arch in a church of Mary—render it plausible that stories of Justinian's Nea Ecclesia serve as political subtexts of the Ps-Basilian story. In response, Ps-Basil claims that Mary herself

oversaw the construction of a new church in her name and that the project took place not in Jerusalem but in Caesarea, and not in the sixth century but in the fourth during Basil's episcopacy.

As in Ps-Theophilus's homily, the Mary of Ps-Basil's offers consolation to non-Chalcedonians. Mary ratifies the primacy of Caesarea. Indeed, she herself directly oversaw the construction of her own church there in Caesarea, not in Jerusalem.

NON-CHALCEDONIAN *RES SACRAE*

According to the Chalcedonian writer Anastasius of Sinai, control of *res sacrae* or "the holy places" (*οἱ ἅγιοι τόποι*) was the marker par excellence of orthodoxy.⁸⁹ God showed his favor toward orthodox Christians by allowing them long-term control of sacred things. To make his point, Anastasius quotes a debate that took place in Alexandria, Egypt, in the early sixth century between the followers of various non-Chalcedonian leaders and a Chalcedonian uneducated in the art of rhetoric. The uneducated Chalcedonian draws a comparison between how God acts and how emperors act by posing the following rhetorical question: "If the Emperor owns certain treasuries and honoured dwellings where his essential secret business [lit. "mysteries"] is despatched, to whom will he confide these places, to those who are faithful to him or to those who are unfaithful?"⁹⁰ Analogously, the Chalcedonian argues, God has demonstrated his support of Chalcedonians by granting them long-term administration of the holy places, even though "the barbarians now control the land of the Holy Places."

Whether a real or imagined debate between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians, Anastasius's story echoes what we already heard from Augustine concerning the sack of Rome: protection of *res sacrae* is a sure sign of God's favor.⁹¹ Even after the Arab takeover of Palestine, Chalcedonians continued to hold the *res sacrae*, not non-Chalcedonians. Non-Chalcedonians had an uphill battle to fight in defending their exclusion from Palestine and the sacrality of their churches. They resorted to the production of pseudepigraphy to render the sacrality of their holy places unassailable and make them preeminent over the *res sacrae* of Jerusalem.⁹²

Non-Chalcedonian homilists used the anniversary celebration to address the fundamental question of what makes a thing sacred. At anniversary celebrations of church consecrations in Egypt, unknown writers implicitly claimed that it did not matter whether an imperially recognized bishop consecrated the place. Therefore, the question of the bishop's legal recognition was irrelevant. It was Christ the King and Lawgiver and his agents who personally consecrated their churches. What made a thing sacred was not the emperor or the emperor's recognition of a bishop. What made a thing sacred was Christ himself and his court. As for the two corollaries of the legal definition, non-Chalcedonians in Egypt claimed that the saints protected their churches, not the law. Non-Chalcedonians in Egypt used the ritual context of anniversary celebrations of consecrations to place the legal discourse

on *res sacrae*, both the definition and the two corollaries, under the direct and unmediated purview of Christ.

Yet a third church claimed primacy as the first church of Mary. Arabic, Garshuni, and Ethiopic manuscripts dating from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries transmit a story set in the early ninth century, during the caliphate of al-Ma'mūn, son of Harūn al-Rashīd (813–833).⁹³ According to this story, al-Ma'mūn orders the destruction of all churches of Egypt, but the first church of Mary located in Athribis makes a stand against the decree. In the end, Mary, “the mother of mercy,” commands the commander to annul the order; the first church of Mary’s stand protects all the churches of Egypt from destruction; and the caliph even enriches the church in Athribis and builds a church of Mary near his palace in Baghdad.

Though the story presents no account of the original construction or consecration of the church, two aspects resonate with the other stories of the first church of Mary. Like Ps-Basil’s story, that of Athribis also features a mosaic Marian icon. The protagonist of the story, John the monk-priest of Athribis, ceaselessly prays for three days before the mosaic icon of Mary. On the third day, the mosaic speaks to John, assuring him of the church’s protection. Like the stories of both Ps-Basil and Ps-Theophilus, the church is impervious to threats of outrage. Mary protects her first church from harm, and it is the political resistance of her first church that prevents all other churches in Egypt from suffering destruction.

Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyze the story of Athribis in detail and place it in historical context,⁹⁴ it is important to note here the story’s resonance with those of Philippi and Koskam. The writer of the story of Athribis sets it in an overtly political situation, one in which the threat of ecclesial dispossession is at stake. As in the stories of Philippi and Koskam, the first church of Mary in Athribis serves as the antidote to ecclesial dispossession. Somehow the primacy of a Marian church makes it capable of responding to the issue of ecclesial dispossession.

Non-Chalcedonians repeatedly made recourse to claims of ecclesial primacy to cope with ecclesial dispossession and to consolidate an identity resistant to the politically endorsed one.⁹⁵ The powers that be may have denied non-Chalcedonian holy places the status of *res sacrae*, but non-Chalcedonians possessed incontrovertible reasons for recognizing the sacrality of their holy places: Christ himself and his saints authorized them by their own hands. In fact, non-Chalcedonians would denigrate the value of imperial authorization in comparison to that of the celestial realm: “You [Chalcedonians] submit to the abominable ordinance of the *autocrator* [i.e., the emperor]; we [non-Chalcedonians] obey the *Pantocrator* [i.e., the Ruler of All, God].”⁹⁶ The powers that be may have elevated Jerusalem, but Mary stands by Caesarea. The powers that be may usurp the *res sacrae* in the Holy Land; non-Chalcedonians create a new Holy Land, authorized by the prophecies and revelations of scripture and the voice of Mary herself. The powers that be may threaten non-Chalcedonian churches; Mary guards them. Mary plays the most

prominent role in these stories, since it is the first church built in her name that comes into question. Why is Mary's church at stake? Why do not the writers speak of the very first church of Christ?

As mentioned above, the Council of Chalcedon and its aftermath politicized Mary in ever-increasing ways. What is more: in the cultural memory of non-Chalcedonians, it was at an early church of Mary in Jerusalem⁹⁷ where Juvenal, who betrayed the non-Chalcedonian cause in exchange for the elevation of his episcopal seat, was forcibly reinstated after a twenty-month-long non-Chalcedonian stronghold over the city. It was at a church of Mary in Jerusalem where non-Chalcedonians were brutally massacred during the celebration of the eucharist on her feast day.⁹⁸ A text known as the *Panegyric of Macarius of Tkōou* includes the story of this massacre. According to the story, as non-Chalcedonians are being martyred, Mary says, "My Lord and my God and my Son, behold, my sacrifice. I have offered it up to you upon your holy altar today, the day of my feast. Accept it unto yourself."⁹⁹ In stark contrast to the stories about Philippi, Koskam, and Athribis, Mary does not protect her church.¹⁰⁰ She allows non-Chalcedonians to be sacrificed (i.e., martyred). The imperial soldiers violently enter the church, kill the men, and violate the women, with the exception of only two virgins.¹⁰¹ Can it be that non-Chalcedonians tried three times to rewrite their cultural memory? Can it be that non-Chalcedonians tried three times to remember a Mary who *did* guard them from outrage at her church? This remains a matter of conjecture. Taken together, the evidence analyzed above does show one thing: how texts that appear fantastic at face value convey in fact the apologetic voices of marginalized communities coping with ecclesial dispossession and defending their *res sacrae*.

In the ritual contexts of dedication, consecration, and anniversary celebrations, bishops did not preach jurists' principles and guidelines. Just as bishops petitioned emperors for adjustments to the laws on *res sacrae*, so they used the ritual context of what was seen and heard in churches to proclaim responses to the law. Legally recognized bishops, like Ambrose of Milan and John Chrysostom, inverted the relative priority of the juridical corollaries. Writers lacking legal authorization, like the non-Chalcedonians in Egypt, overturned the imperial basis of the law. Non-Chalcedonians claimed that Christ and his saints governed them directly without the intermediaries of Christian emperors and their agents.